the SPACE GAMER

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Editor: Howard Thompson
Contributors this issue:
Tim Waddell
Andy Pudewa
Thomas Drake

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WHY SCIENCE FICTION DRIFTS: AN EDITORIAL

Anyone who's been a s-f fan for a number of years is aware of the limited range of products for the science fiction enthusiast. Since s-f is a significant, imaginative aspect of many people's lives, the limited material is a serious frustration. S-f fans have little more than a few magazines, an occasional movie, and books for their enjoyment. And for those with sufficient commitment, time and money there are conventions. Events like "Star Trek" and "Space 1999" are welcome mass t.v. fare, but sporadic. And that's the way it's been for several decades--science fiction drifts as the hobby of a small minority.

Why? The reasons are absurdly simple. S-f products, almost entirely printed words, come from firms for which s-f is only a portion of the business. ANALOG, the s-f magazine with widest circulation at 110-120,000 accounts for a minescule fraction of Conde Nast's total revenue. One page of advertising in Conde Naste's VOGUE must bring in more than all ANALOG's ads for ayear. ANALOG is a small side activity to them even though it's big in the world of science fiction. GALAXY is just another pulp magazine in the UPD stable. THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION is somewhat different in that it's apparently owned by a family firm with some interest in the hobby, but FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION has been a small operation for years.

Book publishers tend to see s-f as a modest, if profitable, part of their business. Donald Wollheim, Roger Elwood and a few other editors are making some headway in establishing separate lines of s-f books, but are operating more as upgraded profit centers for a larger general publisher.

Thus, science fiction products are controlled by people who view s-f as a type of fringe-appeal and not be those who've had the s-f experience themselves. Book and magazine editors, the most influential people in s-f who have an s-f involvement, with the FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION exception, are employees of larger organizations.

When you compare the growth of conflict gaming to science-fiction, the evolution has been totally different. Avalon Hill, that's really Charles Roberts, the founder, started the whole hobby which grew rapidly until Roberts lost control in the early sixties due to a financial liquidity crisis. The company made no real progress or innovations after coming under control of its non-gaming creditors. SPI, that's James Dunnigan, started big in 1970, and has made all the real change and growth in the conflict gaming hobby for five years. Conflict gaming went, SPI still is, through two periods of rapid progress when dominated by two entrepreneurs who were themselves deeply involved in the hobby. Science fiction, despite considerably broader appeal, has drifted and languished. The difference, I think, is in the people who run the product production. No s-f fan controls a s-f literature company, so the s-f hobby drifts; while two individuals deeply involved in conflict gaming account for two periods of rapid growth and change.

I believe a s-f oriented magazine could achieve a one million circulation with promotion and innovation. It could be done by an entrepreneur of ability and money who enjoys s-f himself. None of the existing publishers can hire an s-f editor, put up a bankroll for promotion and do it. ANALOG's circulation might be doubled, but employees can't achieve what an individual, personally committed to the hobby, can. Science-fiction is the hobby of imagination about the future and alternative existences. Yet, science-fiction's powerful, imaginative concepts have been scratched in no more than a drab, commercial fashion. S-f as a big-time experience is an alternative future who's time may never come in our worldline. But, it's a potentiality that has to dazzle the imagination of frustrated science fiction fans.

FEEDBACK ON YOUR FEEDBACK

The feedback on issue #1 TSG articles showed a few things we didn't quite expect. It's clear that at this time the main differen-e between our readers is science fiction versus game interests, not game inexperience versus game experience, as we'd supposed. As can be seen in the tabulation, the four game-related items rated highest and had a markedly lower number of 1, 2, and 3 scores. The non-game material had significally more low scores which shows a definitely favoring of game-related material on the average. But, note in the table that the Eldon Tannish fiction piece had the second highest number of "9" scores. And, Letters and Wantads were necessarily weak in the magazine's first issue. A large minority of readers do like both science fiction and science fiction games. Another, slightly smaller, minority like games, s-f or not, and definitely don't like s-f. One reader said, "I feel that sci-fi short stories etc. should be left to magazines and books, not a gaming sheet, which probably sums up that point of view pretty well.

For us the issue is clear. We need both s-f gamers and games-only fans to survive. The problem lies with the fact that s-f fans will find TSG more enjoyable with science fiction pieces and perhaps man-in-space type science articles. The games-only group clearly finds s-f games an enjoyable extension of their gaming, but have no liking for science fiction. It may be that different or better-written science fiction will strike the games-only group less negatively, but we realize that for the most part they'd prefer the space be devoted to more game material.

TSG Issue #1 Feedback Results (242 responses)

Article	Rating	#1, 2, 3's	# 9's
S-F Gaming News/Plugs	7.26	4	53
Where We're Going	6.90	3	24
SC Strategy	6.83	9	37
S-F Gaming Survey	6.80	8	26
A Diversion	6.32	31	45
Editorial	5.90	24	14
Hugo for Games	5.87	19	15
Letters	5.51	29	5
Wantads	5.39	40	16

This type of dichotomy is inevitable when trying to blend two different pastimes into an enjoyable whole. We will continue with s-f material because our whole effort folds if we lose our s-f fans. If we lose our games-only group we fold too, so we need some understanding from both sides. We aren't asking that you score high an article you don't like. If you don't like our s-f pieces, or any piece for that matter, score it low. But understand that many may enjoy it and we need their support. We'll do our best to increase the quality of all material and continue to expand our size so both gamers and science fiction fans will get more of what they enjoy.

And, by the way, thanks to all of you who took the time to answer our feedback questionnaire. We want to know your opinion--your responses are the foundation of our efforts, so keep sending the input.

Notice

OVERPAYMENTS: Occasionally a customer overpays us by a small amount. W-en this happens, we will try to give you something rather than refund 25¢ or 50¢. If you ordered a game we may return it by first class mail. If that isn't possible, we may enter you for an extra issue of TSG. If you have SC, we may send along some extra Player Record Sheets. If all else fails, it will show up on your records for possible later credit. So, if you get something you didn't expect, this is the reason.

$1 TSG SAMPLES: Some of our ads offered sample TSG issues for various prices to see what was most effective. The $1 price worked worst, so we entered everyone who sent $1 for an extra issue of TSG to give them their money's worth.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: If you do move, let us know fast, so you don't miss TSG or an order. Returned mail just about kills any chance of a profit on your order--so notify us of any address change immediately.

WHERE WE'RE GOING

The first order of business is a big THANK YOU to all those who have subscribed to THE SPACE GAMER. Within the first six weeks TSG was out we received the minimum number of subscribers to survive. And, it looks like the number of potential subscribers is large enough to insure an expansion of our quality and quantity of s-f gaming material for several years. That potential puts the burden of growth on us, right where it belongs. If we don't grow, it means we're failing to deliver the fun s-f gamers want, not that there aren't enough of you to support s-f gaming as a separately identifiable hobby.

The response we've had shows that word-of-mouth publicity is a big factor. A significant proportion of our subscribers heard about us from you. One eager fan even asked us to send sample issues to six of his friends, which we did, and three bought games or subscribed. That's one way to get some people to play with if there aren't many gamers around. So, tell someone about us. It'll help the hobby and probably get some more gamers in your area. If your friend wants a "freebie" copy of TSG, send us his/her name and we'll mail an issue. Most successful gaming groups grow from this basis, and being involved in a group is the best way to enjoy gaming.

You will note non-staff articles in this issue are few. We hope that 50-70% of all material we publish will eventually be generated by non-staff people. Articles about s-f gaming by active hobby members should provide the bulk of the words and should be of most interest. TSG will of necessity be a "house organ" type of zine, but we really mean it when we say we want to give the hobby a forum. That means you don't have to agree with our policies or products to have your say.

Some do distrust a company publication. One unsigned letter accused us of writing all the complimentary STELLAR CONQUEST letters--. We hope that time will prove our credibility. Just because we have the time and money to publish our say doesn't mean we're always right or see things from all sides. Fortunately, our subscribers, that's YOU, aren't characterized by timidity or herd instincts. You clearly delineate what you take issue with. We certainly won't have the luxury of being blind to our own faults.

For the future, we hope to go to bi-monthly publication as soon as we have sufficient volume of material. A quarterly schedule is appropriate for learning the "how to" of this type of venture, but more frequent is better. The number of subscribers enters into this consideration, since economies of scale are involved. Suffice it to say, we can do many more things with 2-3,000 paid subscribers than with 500. These early issues will be somewhat experimental to give us a feel for what you like and what we can learn to do best. Before committing resources to making TSG bigger, we have to be sure our content is appropriate in subject matter and quality. As long as you keep giving us strong feedback, TSG can make a positive contribution to the growth and enjoyment of s-f gaming.

Some have asked, justifiably, about TSG's publication schedule. Small gaming and s-f zines have been known to fold, and this issue is several weeks later than we'd hoped. Final work on THE YTHRI was given priority, which we felt was justified. Issue #3 is scheduled for mailing in November, so you have time to send in orders before Christmas. February and May, 1976, are the next two dates after that. Depending on how circulation and contributions go, we will try to "get-ahead" of our 1976 schedule, if time is available. We will try to give firm dates for the next issue each time. Regular reliability is very important and we don't want to give the impression we aren't concerned about target dates--we are. Our problem is that Metagaming and TSG are moving from what has been more of a super fun hobby into a small business. Just the volume of order processing and record-keeping has reached the point where further growth will require additional labor and service. A small computer would help, but we'd also have to find time to design and write programs, even if we could afford a computer in the next twelve months.

Subscribers will note this issue came in an envelope and was third-class mail. Third class costs 3.9¢ per issue more to mail, but is two weeks faster than bulk mailing on the average. The envelope will insure that your copy will get to you in better shape. The questionnaire asks about third-class versus bulk mailing to see if subscribers would prefer an extra four pages of magazine or the faster mailing service. We'll see.

There was a lot of response to a new name for our "Hymenoptria" game. Some name suggestions appear in our questionnaire. One option for us is to get permission to use the name "Dragon Masters" that went with the Jack Vance novel that originally used the Gaughan illustrations. The game is only loosely related to concepts in the novel, but a s-f novel may be a way of insuring greater sales. There will be some preview information on the game next issue after we get the THE YTHRI successfully launched.

Our big news this time is, of course, THE YTHRI, as detailed in our advertisement. It should be well worth the money for anyone new to gaming or those that often want a fast-moving, two-player game. It's experimental in several ways, and if successful should go a long way to boost s-f gaming.

Since the essence of s-f gaming is the games, we're moving as rapidly as we can in that direction. Our game discount policy has been very popular and we've extended it to our own games plus adding more titles this issue. We plan to publish two major games next year. The spring game will be "Hymenoptria," sure to be renamed, with the fall game scheduled as the winning game of our game design contest.

We may also try prototype games as an experiment. This would be a limited edition game emphasizing do-it-yourself components for a low production cost. It would most likely be a non-staff design with the purpose of giving our most avid gamers more variety, and testing a design's appeal before publishing it in a professional, wide-distribution format. Hopefully we would be able to publish several prototype games per year, the best of which would go on to wider publication. Only a few hundred of each would be printed with prices in the $3-$4 range. Anyone who bought one would get a hefty bonus discount on any re-publication in more expensive form. Response to the prototypes would determine the design's future.

At this time, the prototype idea seems a good one to us, and it will probably be tried at least once. It has the advantage of providing more, cheaper games for hard-core gamers while testing and de-bugging what may eventually become a best seller. Since our time is constrained, anything that spreads the testing and de-bugging effort helps us. Yes, that means the game won't be too good for novices because of less complete rules and play aids. But the prototypes should be great for gamers who end up re-designing games to suit

themselves anyway--and there are a lot of those. Any comments on prototypes in addition to the feedback question will be appreciated.

Several people have asked about publishing s-f/f games they've designed. Metagaming will be publishing non-staff designs next year, so it's a real possibility. However, we can't tell you that we'll publish your game without ever seeing it. The best thing to do is briefly describe the game to us, so we can respond to the general concept. If it sounds like something we'd publish, if well designed, we'll ask you to send us a complete copy for evaluation. We gain no right to your game and no promise of publication or remuneration is implied in an evaluation. It's just a necessary step to determine whether or not we want to negotiate for publication rights. When dealing with any publisher we advise having the draft of a game notarized as your property and design before mailing.

What about the "Game Design Contest"? The contest is mainly a publicity vehicle to gain attention for our desire for outside game design. Details for the contest will be in issue #3 of TSG and any design received before its ending date will be eligible for prizes. Prizes will essentially be cash advances on royalties that are non-refundable if royalties aren't sufficient to cover the advance. That means, you keep the prize even if the game is never published or makes little money. The best design received will be published.

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY GAME RATINGS

Last issue we published science fiction and fantasy game ratings as compiled by Thomas Galloway. At this time, we don't know if the survey will be maintained by him or not. However, ratings seem important to you, and us, so we've decided to maintain a s-f & f game rating ourselves on our own time, or until we get a qualified volunteer. Ratings from the previous survey will be incorporated with ones received since then, and our questionnaire will rate games on a continuing basis. The up-dated ratings below exclude games with too few ratings to be meaningful. Games with an asterisk had enough ratings to include, but the statistical variability still will be great. It should be emphasized that even STARFORCE and STELLAR CONQUEST with the most responses still had few enough votes for their scores to change significantly with more input.

To clarify our ratings terminology, hours refers to the time needed to complete an average game. Complexity refers to the game system and play. Physical quality refers to the game components and production, and over-all reflects the players general like or dislike for the game. Complexity, physical quality, and over-all are rated on a 0-10 scale, with 0 being the simplest/poorest and ten being most difficult/best.

To the best of our knowledge, GORGAMELLA and SPACE HUK are game mastered, play-by-mail games. They were rated in Thomas' survey, but we received no additional votes on them. We'd appreciate hearing from anyone who is in either of these games or has detailed knowledge about them.

Your ratings are needed to improve validity. It helps other gamers decide how to ration their game dollars for the most enjoyment, so give them a hand and stick in your two cents worth!

	Hours	Complexity	Physical Quality	Over-all
*Gorgamella	NA	6.35	7.35	8.71
*Space Huk	NA	7.33	7.50	8.50
Dungeons & Dragons	NA	7.68	7.88	8.39
Stellar Conquest	6.50	7.08	7.21	8.39
*Star Probe	--	8.50	7.75	7.63
*Lensman	9.80	7.98	6.88	7.48
*Star Lord	3.20	4.83	6.50	7.33
Triplanetary	4.25	5.73	7.46	6.89
*Alien Space	3.20	4.67	5.83	6.83
Starforce	4.18	6.31	7.65	6.59
*4000A.D.	2.50	3.10	5.80	6.10
Helus Deep	2.64	4.97	5.66	5.59
*Rigellian Wars	4.10	3.10	3.13	3.50

S-F GAMING NEWS/PLUGS

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN, September, 1975; $1.50.

Not a game, obviously, but an entire big issue devoted to summarizing the latest scientific knowledge of the solar system. Anyone even mildly interested in astronomy owes himself the pleasure of having this compact reference. The lead article by Carl Sagan is followed by separate articles on the inner planets and the moon with articles on the outer planets, smaller bodies (Titan is very intriguing), and solar fields. Almost as interesting as Black Holes, which have been the subject of fascinating articles in recent issue of SCIENCE, for those with the bug.

TUNNELS AND TROLLS

From Flying Buffalo Inc., Box 1467, Scotsdale, AZ 85252; $3. Ken St. Andres, designer. This is a "Dungeons and Dragon's" type game, but shorter and simpler. We don't have a review copy yet, so we don't know much about it personally, but commentary so far is favorable and the illustrations have been mentioned as better than those in D & D.

STAR RAIDER

From David Casciano, 314 Edgley Avenue, Glenside, PA 19308; $5.99. Includes 320 hand-illustrated, lightweight, die-cut counters, 23" by 35" star map in black, red, and yellow on heavy cardstock; 99 star description cards already cut; an 8-page 6" by 9" typeset rules booklet; and comes in a "zipper bag" with a black and white cover sheet. The rules are about a fifth as long as STELLAR CONQUEST's and hand illustrated. The rules have some flaws such as Basic and Advanced game versions are mentioned, but never appear. Also, movement rules appear in two separate places on the same page under separate "Movement" headings. This one is probably best for those with previous experience on conflict simulation games. Despite the rules, the game may play well and we'll have more comment after some playtesting. There are innovative wrinkles and brief rules which leave room for working out problems yourself without continuous reference.

SPACE CENTURIONS, revised

Information from the designer Ivan Travnicek, 205 Walker Springs Rd., Taylors, SC 29687. This is a massively detailed game that's at least five years old. Earlier versions were published in SPARTAN. Ivan says, "the game is really more of a hobby than a game, so whatever you say, don't tell 'dabblers' and 'dilletantes' to write me. The 'game' takes a great deal of time, but is very rewarding..." Since copies are hard to come by, be prepared to pay for xeroxing rules and a self-addressed, stamped envelope should facilitate response.

KELLY FREAS REPRINTS

Kelly Freas, Rt. #4, Box 4056A, Virginia Beach, VA 23457. When we had the STELLAR CONQUEST cover done, Kelly passed on a flyer, a beauty in itself, for six reproductions of full-color cover illustrations. Included are ANALOG covers for 2/75 ("Lifeboat") and 6/74 ("Stargate") and for DAW books: "Conscience Interplanetary," "The Mind Net," "Zenya," and "Warriors of Dawn". They are 12½" by 19", without type on white, museum quality paper. A full set is $19.95, signed $29.95. Single prints are $4.00, signed $6.00. Postpaid and mailed in a sturdy tube. (Virginia residents, add 4% sales tax.)

LASER BOOKS

Roger Elwood is editing a new series of s-f paperback books that emphasize people/action in stores. They have distinctive Kelly Freas covers and are available in bookstores. Why mention it? Well, they aren't bad and with few bargains in s-f these days, the 95¢ price should be encouraged.

GREYHAWK

This is the new supplement to DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS. $5 from TSR Hobbies, Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147 or $4.25 from us for TSG subscribers. Sixty-three pages chockfull of new material. The content relates directly to the content and format of the original three D&D booklets. Basically, you have new rules, additions to existing rules, and suggested changes. The supplement is to be used with the first three books, so don't order it by itself.

EMPIRE OF THE PETAL THRONE

$25 from TSR (see address above) or $21.25 from us for TSG subscribers. Designed by Professor M.A.R. Barker.

Includes three full-color maps, 8½" by 11" rules booklet and is boxed. Billed as "Fantasy Adventure on the World of Tekumel," the game will surely become an obsession of the hard-core fantasy gamers and Tolkein fans. It must have been designed for love--with that much effort, shining shoes would have to pay better by the hour. More in later issues; reviews solicited.

PRELUDE TO ARMAGEDDON

Glen Taylor, 6908 Buchanan St., Landover Hills, MD 20784, and the rest of the Axis Wargaming Company, moderates PRELUDE TO ARMAGEDDON, a very complex tactical space-war game. Turns are sent to a non-playing moderator about every three weeks, and he correlates all the happenings of the turn and sends the results back to the players in the form of a printout. At the start of the game all players are equal except for starting positions, with the player deciding the number, type, and equipment for all his ships. The game represents purely space-war--no planets are involved. The mapboard is three-dimensional and infinite. The game is won by damaging and destroying opponents' ships. Intelligence is limited with the players knowing only the general area where each opponent is located at the start of the game. During the game your knowledge is only what your sensors (which are directional and limited in range) can pick up. The weapon types are High-Energy Laser (which can be fired in a tight or wide-angle beam), Short Range Battle Canon which fire grapeshot, Nuclear Warheads (which can have proximity or timed fuses), Ion Bullets (which are very destructive but have a very small blast radius), propulsion systems and Energy Potential. There are formulas for acceleration, true-distance, and computing combat odds for the various weapons. Most combat results depend on chance. Inter-player diplomacy plays a very important part as you try to persuade the other players to attack someone other than you without giving any hint where your ships are, in case of a backstab. This game is not for novices and should contain many surprises. Rules 35¢, game fee 20¢ per turn. (by Glen Taylor)

MIDGAARD 2

Thomas E. Drake, Rt. 10, Box 294-K, Cookeville, TN 38501. MIDGAARD 2 is primarily a fantasy game and secondarily a medieval wargame. The large majority of the board is unknown to any one player at game start. More information can be obtained by buying (or otherwise acquiring) maps. Scattered throughout the board are treasure boards, magical weapons, etc. etc. in much detail. Rulers, Hecos, and wizards are the three main types of players and their characters vary greatly. Invention and imagination are important and players add to the game within the basic framework. Thomas' current game was full at about 30 and there was a waiting list as of June. Rules are $1 and the game zine, presumably with continually up-dated information, is 25¢ per issue.

WAR OF WIZARDS

From TSR also (see address above) for $7.50 or from us at $6.50 for TSG subscribers. This is a complete board-game of a duel between mighty wizards. Lots of spells, magic, chants, conjuring, and assorted skull-duggery. Not as time-consuming as many fantasy games, since it's meant to be played to completion with a winner. Reviews solicited.

THE THIRD MILLENIA INC.

This company which published a few s-f games about two years ago and is now defunct to the best of our knowledge. (We'll retract on hard information, but they seem dead.) Some of their games are still available from Lou Zocchi, 1513 Newton Drive, Biloxi, MS 39532. It's probably best to write Third Millenia first before investing money.

At this time, we have little information on the games below, other than the name and source. More information is being requested and reviews are welcome. A self-addressed, stamped envelope will probably get information.

BATTLE OF HELMS DEEP, $3 from Richard Jordison, 8834 McNulty Dr., St. Louis, MO 63114.

BATTLE OF FIVE ARMIES, $4.50 from Larry Smith, 2525 Via Campesina #203, Palos Verdes Estates, CA 90274.

LENSMAN, $5 from Spartan, Box 1017, Bellflower, CA 90706.

STARSHIP COMBAT, $4 from Gary McGrath, Box 1245, Lafayette, IN 47902.

THE SIEGE OF MINAS TIRITH, $5 from Fact and Fantasy Games, Box 1472, Maryland Heights, MO 63043.

WORLD OF THE WORLDS II, by subscription only from RAND, Box 1776, Liberty Corners, NY 07938.

REVIEWS OF DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

D & D is the ultimate fantasy game. Players start as a Fighter, Magic-User, Cleric, or Thief. They may choose to be a human, elf, dwarf, half-elf, or even a hobbit. They must decide to be lawful, neutral, or chaotic. There is never any winner. In a good campaign players start in a town. First, they must get a room at one of the several inns. Then, they usually go to a general store to pick up some equipment such as rope, sacks, etc. If they have any money left, they'll go to a tavern, have a drink, and try to hire some men. How well they fare at this is determined by charisma, one of the abilities. The other abilities are intelligence, strength, wisdom, dexterity and constitution. They'll then begin to ask towns people about the surroundings, about any legends, etc. The next day bright and early they'll pack up and set out down the road. If they have bad luck, sometimes they even have to get a job to keep from starving! All this takes a lot of work and time for the referee, but it's more than worth it! The most stimulating part of the game is the fact that anything can happen. Nothing is impossible. Even when you are standing between a cliff and a troll, there is still hope, perhaps Levitation boots! Over a hundred monsters are provided for, from trolls, orcs, zombies, werewolves, vampires, dragons, gargoyles, rocs, and giant purple worms, to hell hounds, rust monsters, giant slugs, and even tyranosaurus rexes and giant tics. Whether you're exploring the depths of the dungeons, roaming in some forsaken wilderness, or being pursued by an evil wizard in an intricate castle, I'm sure you'll be having one heck of a good time!

Tim Waddell

If you took everything possible or impossible that you ever dreamed about, read about, or imagined; put it in a medieval setting, and heaped it all into one set of rules for a game, you would have created DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. As a game, D&D is a fantastical outlet for the imagination. It has the quality of being infinitely flexible, and with it comes the reality of impossibility.

What you get when you buy D&D are three booklets, filled with basic guidelines for a fantasy campaign. The first book is Men and Magic. This basically tells about getting a character, equipping him, and getting off to a start. Magic and clerical spells are listed and described for reference whenever needed. With these spells, magic-users and clerics can make people, monsters, things, and objects, do anything from sleeping to serving them or dying. With rules for developing your own new spells, the sky's the limit. I feel that book II, Monsters and Treasure is the most interesting book of all. This book describes all the mean, nasty, and horrifying creatures that the players get to fight. Then, when they are finished fighting, this book describes many rich treasures and countless magic items, to aid the players in finding more and better loot. Volume III, The Underworld and Wilderness Adventures is probably the most important book, because it tells how to go about playing the game, in either of two settings. Dungeons must be mapped out by the referee in advance, and care taken to detail. The wilderness is rather a do-it-as-you-go- situation. This book also includes ways to spend your treasure, and other interesting things such as; Castle construction, Naval combat and adventures, Baronies, and much more.

There are drawbacks to the game however; as there are in any game. D&D cannot even begin to get interesting in less than 20 hours playing time. Hundreds of hours of work must be done ahead of time by the referee, and it takes a fairly long time to prepare on the part of the players.

In this game there is no victor as such, but the object is to gain experience (by finding treasures and beating up on monsters) and become more powerful and gain more possessions. Staying alive is a big part of the game, as there are always monsters that hate you, lurking in the gloom. But, if you should happen to die, don't worry; you can always start again.

If more complexity is desired, the supplement GREYHAWK adds outstanding improvements, and many more ideas. Also, the Strategic Review, a TSR newlestter has some good things.

Andy Pudewa

FROM YOU.....

Having seen a few "fanzines," I found yours rather interesting. It had a great deal of hard information than compared to some with "soft chit-chat" about nothing. Incidentally, your title HYMENOPTRIA sounds like a disease that affects female virgins.

This reminds me that back when Avalon Hill was working on an Auto Racing game, it was called tentatively-Grand Prix. That was changed when someone helpfully pointed out what a non-French speaking saleswoman might call it.

Merle Grabhorn, Tunkhannock, PA

Thank you for the copy of THE SPACE GAMER. In addition I would like to compliment you on your decision to go ahead and develop HYMENOPTRIA. Of the games described in your first flyer, I felt that that one, more than either of the others took full advantage of the possibilities for new and innovative concepts that seems to me to be one of the major strengths of science fiction gaming. A planethead assault, despite the obvious differences in scope, locale, and weaponry, is still inescapably related to the concept of the beachhead assault of contemporary wargaming. The basis situation and goals are the same. In HUMENOPTRIA, however, one is dealing with a premise almost totally without contemporary or historical precedent. This should allow the player the maximum amount of freedom to exercise his imagination and test his ability to deal with new and alien concepts. This, after all, is what science fiction is all about.

With all this in mind, then, I was frankly very surprised to read that the majority of reactions to HYMENOPTRIA were negative. Who more than science fiction fans should normally be expected to be willing to accept new and unusual ideas. I hope that this reaction is not indicative of a streak of conservatism in the science fiction gaming community. The insistance on only familiar or traditional game concepts could prove extremely detrimental to science fiction gaming's attempt to provide a viable and unique alternative to contemporary and historical wargaming. Consequently, I feel that your decision to develop HYMENOPTRIA despite the negative reaction is a very healthy one, coming, as it does, from a company placing itself in the forefront of science fiction gaming.

Marco Alpert, West Los Angeles, CA

Our gaming group at Beyer HS has enjoyed playing STELLAR CONQUEST for several months now. It is easily our most popular multi-player game in our library of some 20 games. Our group includes faculty as well as students and we have a math course which includes the playing and designing of such games.

Enclosed are some scoring sheets that have developed here to assist the players. It is interesting to observe the development of the strategies used by players as they become more experienced. They usually are as follows:

1. Learning mechanics, get a DN and just fight.
2. Pure development, avoid all battles for 7-8 production years, builds strong battle fleet late in game.
3. Exploration-send out weak fleets to "claim" as many worlds as possible to prevent others from defending them.
4. Raiding-build a DN and ATK and then develop industry. The ships are used to attack an opponents home base at a crucial time in his/her development. Properly done the victim is not a factor in the remainder of the game.

No effective defense against the last technique has been developed as yet. A sure defense tends to restrict development.

Amberse M. Banks, Fred C. Beyer HS
Mathematics Department, Modesto, CA

Re your editorial, my dislike of it arises from feeling that you are too defensive about your hobby. We are game freaks, we enjoy games, do we really give a damn if other people look down their noses at us? If you want to meet a really wierd minority in this country, play duplicate bridge for a few years.

William F. Schiring, Burlington, VT

Your editorial strikes a familiar chord in my mind. Most of my friends are science-fiction addicts, and strangely enough the most dedicated of them are also wargamers. Unfortunately, the world of hard core wargamers, we are regarded as strangely aberrant imbeciles, more to be pitied than ridiculed.

A Hugo for games? I doubt it, at least for the present. The SF awards arose from the realization that mainstream fiction had an award for outstanding authorship, and that Science Fiction was never recognized. Hugos are extended to movies and TV shows because of the Oscars and Emmies which bypassed them (2001 was a notable exception). Before we can expect a Hugo, we have to get games (in general) recognized as a legitimate artform, and organize some regular awards for excellence in presentation, clarity of rules, originality, fidelity of simulation (of a historical or literary event transformed to a game), artwork, playability, and so on. Once an objective standard of performance exists, and players can compare games on a better basis than "my game's better than yours", then we can start bucking for a Hugo.

Norman S. Howe, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Got your first issue. Looks decent, you may have something going though there is no telling really. SF gamers are not your run of the mill wargamers (who aren't human anyway) so I have no way to judge.

On your ratings, you left out one thing, and that is price. For example, STARFORCE sells for $8 (6 in bunches) which gives you .87 (1.16) points per dollar. TRIPLANETARY used to sell for $6.80 and is now $8, which gives you 1.13 (now .96) points per dollar. RIGELIAN WARS, so low in your ratings would be 1.4 points per dollar, about the highest of the bunch (I don't know all the prices). While you get what you pay for, there is the law of diminishing returns. Note that the scale (1.4--1.16--.96) is opposite of the ratings. Might make an interesting article if the other prices fit the line. I was told once that D&D sold for 16, which puts it down to 157, but I am just not sure of that price.

Steve Cole, JagdPanther Publications
Amarillo, TX

(D&D is $10 from TSR--Ed.)

May I be but among the first to extend my heartfelt appreciation to you and yours for the enormous contribution you have made to the Science Fiction Gaming hobby with your first issue of THE SPACE GAMER.

In THE SPACE GAMER I have found inspiration. I have found the succinctly unambiguous raison d'etre for designers and players alike.

The future of Science Fiction gaming is in good hands. The gauntlet has been thrown; so let the play begin.

Brett A. Tondreau, Galaxy 2, Northridge, CA

At first I was just going to fill out your questionnaire, but then I decided, what the hell, I'll send you a letter too.

I enjoyed your editorial. There's a lot of good healthy belligerent anti-socialism in there. You laid it on a bit heavy with the justification and apologia, tho, escapism and/or entertainment needs no other justification than it is none of anyone else's business how you get your jollies.

I was very disappointed to learn that you were dropping your plastic map sheets. This was a big plus in your game, and it will hurt the sales of your subsequent games. Do try and get back to plastic maps (and, maybe, die-cut plastic counters, too?) real soon.

I thought the basic ideal behind "A Diversion" sound. But get a good writer. What you might want is a story along the lines of a game. A sort of STELLAR CONQUEST come to life, so to speak.

Rickey Allen, Columbus, GA

... a short critique of SC. Basically, I question whether or not a cohesive interstellar governmental system would be possible when messages travel at the speed of light and transport is slower. But as a game I think its great, though there should be some optional rules (on 3-dimensionality, etc.)

Michael Striley, Independence, MO

I have been into wargaming for some time now. Although I enjoy it very much, it has always seemed to lack something. The something it lacks of course is the science fiction aspect. I have been reading science fiction since I learned to read, and it is almost a second life for me. So, needless to say, I think your company is definitely worth watching.

Norman Apperson, New York, NY

Re TSG: I don't see how you could really want a game Hugo. As with the other Hugos, they would be thrown off quite often by people who don't relaly know what's going on--the local fringe fans or non-fans. This is especially painful in the case of the film Hugos, since quite a few fans themselves don't see a whole lot, even BNF's (Big Name Fans). And what with the prices involved. I would suspect very few fans, even ones that were "into" the hobby, would get a good idea of all the games around. Just the well-known well-advertised one. Why not peer awards insetad, like the Nebulas of the FAAn awards? Then you could hit all the way across the field. Best game (perhaps sf and fantasy separated for this, too), best designer, contribution to the field, etc. (Make the distinction between amateur and pro, too). Then you would have an award that would actually mean something about the game.

I think a problem with many sf games is that they are merely "conventional" wargames in spaceman's clothing. An example which comes to mind readily is STARCRUISER. The starcruisers and torpedos could just as easily be aircraft carriers and kamikazi planes. Perhaps a question the readers could respond to would be just what makes an sf game an sf game? Is it having spaceships and radioactivity-produced mutations and bug eyed monsters, or is it having something that can be offered in no other format? Like if you have a planet that just sits there in space, you can

change your spaceships into oceangoers and that planet an island/continent. But get that planet to orbit around its sun...and it's an s-f game without a doubt.

K. Allen Bjorke, Minneapolis, MN

One bit of advice based on my experience with your SC rules, I think you underestimate the value of examples. Sure, all the information is there but I have yet to have anybody read the rules and understand them perfectly. There seems to be some common misconceptions that new players fall into that a couple good examples could help eliminate. For instance, some new players don't understand that each planet has a separate economy.

William J. Denholm III, Menlo Park, CA

First, congratulations on your new venture. A magazine is the only way MC can stave off the demographic monster long enough to suceed or fade genteely. May it be the former.

The premier TSG prompts a few thoughts on gaming and MC's direction in it. The idea of complex board games--like SC, Pblitz, or what haveyou--achieving the respectability of fully balanced conflict games like chess or go doesn't seem impossible to me. All you need is some nicely potty person willing to spend a few million for organization and prizes. After seeing how much mileage you can get out of putting balls in holes, hoops, and over fences, I'll believe anything. But baord simulations will never be on the same level of competition as chess, say, because the operation of all those little counters is aesthetically clumsy, and because the opporunity for great and dramatic single moves is dissipated by graduated counters and a continuum of conflict results--which, along the map, are the collective heart of that which we all enjoy.

As I see it, the quality of competition among boardgamers is a matter of concern for the same folk who buy liferafts in case the polar caps metl soon and believe that von Daniken is forthright. Or perhaps worse, because they are closet moralists, and words like fun or game send them racing to the nearest plain brown wrapper store to get a quick societal fix. Jeepers! If I can sensitize the synapses learning the directional system in Starforce, think what a flash I'd be after figuring out nine-place logs. But I don't do that. Even the cutest logarithm is not thematic, and that is what our kind of boardgame is all about. Chess is about a conflict of motion; go involves a conflict of position; boardgames involve both, with the addition of an abstracted putative reality system. None of them are particularly useful. Nor is an Escher dry point.

Thus we come to it. MC knows it is in the publishing business. Does it know it is in the art business? Or maybe that's not quite right, but let the question hang for a moment. If you will recall the fertile sixties, you may remember commercial hypes like found art and assemblage art. Interestingly, though, there was also an unbound book which came in a box, so written that every page was a unit. Read the pages as they came and you got one story; shuffle the pages and you got another; shuffle them again and you got yet another, and so on. Well, sir, thatis also a boardgame, or what a boardgame does.

Boardgame stories vary between two literary forms--the novel and the play, corresponding roughly to the two-player and the multi-player structure respectively. Likewise, there are opposite breeds of player which, for the sake of symmetry, can be called the novelist and the actor. (Hmm--this has gotten more extended than I'd like). The novelist is the fiddler, the solitaire player who works out his private fantasies by destroying chips of cardboard with the effortless malice of an avenging god. The actor, on the other hand, seizes upon a portion of the theme of a game and adopts it as a characterization--thus the ridiculous accents which flow around a Diplomacy board. This assumed character exists to divert attention from the fact that the purpose of multi-player games is to provide scope for cruelty. You can devastate your opponent in a two-player game; you get to humiliate him in a multi-player work, because other people see what happens. (I don't mean to suggest that people are all one breed or the toher, but they do have preferences.)

Now there is a one-way street to consider. The actor can play the novelist's game, but the novelist cannot solitaire a multi-player game, particularly where the shift of alliances is crucial and/or force secrecy rules operate. SC effectively rules itself out for the solitaire player. And yet I think there are many more solitaire players than not, if only from lack of opportunity to be otherwise. If you are out of high school and college, and do not belong to a club, the chances are nill, as you've pointed out. That being so, do you have to wonder further as to why SC has not sold as well as you thought? Careful reading of your own advertising sheet convinced me not to buy it, even though the money is at my finger-tips. (I do intend to buy Hymenoptria despite the six-player threat, because of the unusual subject matter.)

Lynn Willis, San Francisco, CA

WANTADS

I would like to contact anyone interested in playing s-f games in the Des Moines area. Clay Webb, 7604 Wilden Dr., Urbandale, Iowa 50322 276-8995.

STELLAR CONQUEST Tournament and Match Game Rating Service--For information, send $1.00 and SSAE to Layout Design Specialists, P. O. Box 485, Glenview, Illinois 60025.

Edward Cooper, 6350 Cinnabar Dr., Riverside, CA 92509 wants to get in touch with all STELLAR CONQUEST players in this area. Phone 714-684-7335.

Will moderate STELLAR CONQUEST on non-profit basis, multi- and two player games. Want to be sure the game's played "straight?" I will be impartial. Send stamp for details of PBM system (and reduced 8 1/2 by 11 turnsheets available). KELLY MOORMAN, Box 7235, Monroe, LA 71201.

3D STAR MAP KITS & plans. Build a 3 in./parsec accurate 3D Star Map using this complete kit. Everything you need but a screwdriver. All stars within 6 parsecs (80 + stars). A massive 3 ft. square frame supports the stars which form a sphere of space below. Stars glow proper colours by a black light included. Computer printout of data and the 3D coordinates included along with front view key. $30ppd. A map like this will really help you get the hang of an interstellar game. Computer data gives Gliese #, Star Name, Absolute Magniture, Distance, Spectral Type, Top View in Polar (θ,p) and Rectangular (x.y) coordinates, Front View in Rectangular-all in Parsec Units. Six Parsec list only, $3 post paid. Also available is the entire Gliese Near Star Catalogue translated as above, over 1900 stars. Build a GIANT 3D Star Map! or make one heck of a game. Complete computer output only $20. Make Cheques payable to Theta Enterprises, 114 N. McKinney, Richardson, TX 75080.

Wanted: science fiction games and waregames. A twenty-five game want list. Send me a list of the games you would like to sell and your asking price. Also send a s.s.a.e. to James DeCook, 2877 Bellwood, Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

Wanted...Wanted...Wanted

The Space Gamer wants articles and material for publication. For issue #3 we are going to a 1¢ per word payment basis rather than the award-by-feedback-rating basis. At your option, you may take 2¢ per word in goods instead. All submissions should be typed double-spaced with your name on each sheet. If you have a very neat printing o.k., but type it if at all possible.

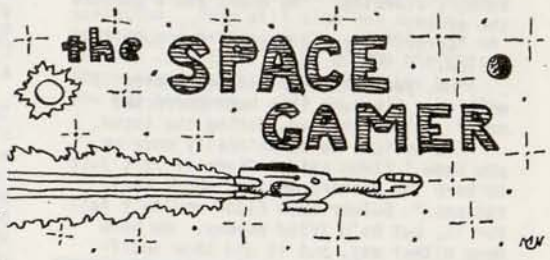
We need reviews of Star Probe, Star Lord, Tunnels and Trolls, Star Raider, War of the Worlds II, Battle of Five Armies, Siege of Minias Tirith, Battle of Helms Deep, Alien Space, Sorcerer (when out), and The Ythri (when published), plus other games not mentioned. Our desire is to have full reviews done by readers rather than staff.

We need narratives of STELLAR CONQUEST games. Concise, descriptive narratives by players won't be easy, but we have lots or requests for such material.

Science fiction gaming strategy, news, and s-f gaming activities are all potential areas for publishable articles.

Unused submissions will be returned if accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage.

S-f and s-f conflict art is needed for our word-heavy pages. We pay up to $5 for an illustration (for a cover) or with issues of TSG or credit toward purchases. Help our appearance and send us some illustrations!



Mark Norton

DIVERSION: ELDON TANNISH

(Eldon is a rapidly developing novice competing in NORCON, the annual North American tournament of The Game. "The Game" is a super-sophisticated realistic computer simulation of the not too distant future. Eldon has survived second round qualifying and next completes with ten other highly-rated players. The computer generates a different scenario for each game played. The only constant is six hours of intense interaction with the terminal, trying to master a new situation. Wide knowledge, intelligence, and decisiveness are all that's needed to win.)

An hour-old sun cast morning shadows over Eldon's calm form. Slow, three per minute breathing was barely perceptible as he stretched on a hotel balcony lounge. Ten minutes of Alpha meditation cleared his mind before starting the dual-hemisphere theta induction exercises. Eldon wasn't a cognicept adept, but he was proficient in focused brain exercises. The night's emotional releases had fully de-cathected his ego-states, leaving minimal sub-conscious disturbance. Thirty minutes later he was fully clothed and ready to start a steak, egg, and avocado breakfast. High energy and high living, but morning was his time and he knew to make the best of it for competition.

"That's a bit much even for a wonder-boy, don't you think," intruded on his morning calm. "With luck maybe it'll put you to sleep by eleven," continued Bulmar Denholt.

"Ah, Master Denholt," Eldon said as he rose deferentially, "a pleasure to see you." Bulmar was noted for his grating personality, but it was useless to respond in kind. That he'd be in today's game with Eldon was of interest to both.

"Just wanted to see if you'd checked the computer assignments mix-up," said Bulmar, standing. "No doubt you'd guessed the error."

"Error?" queried Eldon, "not sure I follow."

"Oh, you were over-matched, being in with us. I'm sure it's been corrected now." Bulmar grinned, daring the issue.

"We novices do occasionally move-up, you know," Eldon said. "Even if it's just to keep the masters anxious about their ratings." Bulmar knew Eldon wouldn't fall for it, but he'd tried anyway. No harm done either way, but it did show indifferent aggression consistent with his reputation.

"As I recall, you faired badly with me last NORCON," said Bulmar, an understatement considering he'd done most to knock Eldon out of the tournament.

"I haven't forgotten such a valuable lesson," Eldon said as Bulmar was nodding and leaving. Eldon had learned to be far more specific in defining game alliances. Bulmar had done exactly as promised and still managed to get Eldon taken out. You couldn't be too careful.

Early crowds were already moving into the spectator areas. Today's attendance would be maximum for the first games of master level competition. Eldon had finished breakfast, watching from an upper level walkway where he was likely to meet a few gamers. Solitude immediately before a game gave him an optimal mental set by the time he went to the cubicle for the fifteen minute scenario briefing.

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Eldon stood and stretched while the computer processed his latest input decisions. He slowly paced three cramped steps in the space behind his chair while watching the video situation display. Too many people, just too many in the game, to be able to feel safe control of any situation. Despite the fact he was doing better than expected in barely holding his own, he felt uncomfortable at the mercy of continued negotiations and shifting alliances.

It was a one planet game scenario with each player controlling a corporate state fighting for developmental rights. The struggle was quasi-economic with less than full-scale military action. With the game two-thirds gone, Eldon's full ability and some luck had left him in the middle of the pack. He'd become a major supporter of one of the strongest players, helping take the edge off his loner's vulnerability, but the diplomatic necessities chaffed.

Pressure was building on his ocean-farming/resort complex. Bulmar was surely behind the change in weather with his orbital energy satellites. Cooler cloud cover hurt the resorts as well as algae production rates. His patron ally seemed to be exerting less than full effort to back Bulmar off. His patron, a truly gifted master at the Game, wouldn't let him be crippled, but he would try to keep Eldon from being more than a dependent ally.

Cold weather, was there an advantage? The exploration data of the computer-simulated planet so far revealed generally earth-like ecological systems. On earth cold upwelling water near Antarctica supported high populations of krill, a small, high-protein, shrimpish crustacean. The upwelling brought nutrients to the warmer upper water levels where the krill could survive. The cooler weather spawned by Bulmar's satellites was killing the tropical algae strains, but it might create excellent conditions for some other kind of edible sea life.

Eldon already had a thermal power plant for his food processing/resort complex that functioned on the temperature difference between warm tropical surface water and cool deeper water. The present plant didn't bring up water from a deep enough level to get a significant upwelling of bottom, mineral-heavy water. But, it could be done even if it meant reduced net electrical output from the power plant.

Eldon quit pacing and sat. He began working rapidly on his personal computer, setting up decisions for the next turn. Each player had his own computer that supported personally developed analytical programs and information. The personal computers were each player's tool in the game. The better you were in using your computer, the more you could do in the game.

Early results from the previous turn were coming back, but Eldon's furious concentration ignored them. More money for immediate research into suitable oceanic life-forms. Cost estimates for a temporary 1,000 foot downward extention of the power plant's huge intake ducts. A check into the simulated off-world commodity market to see how deep his opponents had bought into algae food futures in expectation that his poor crop would drive prices up. A feasibility study on available mercenary groups who might disrupt Bulmar's surface energy reception stations to reduce his energy available for weather control. Eldon checked detail after detail to build a plan of action that would make him look helpless, but turn the tables at the last minute with large, unexpected supplies of fish protein. His opponents were helping by already anticipating their success in the commodity markets. Their buy-up of algae futures at low prices was perfect. There would be a food algae shortage, but a surplus of fish protein would keep algae prices at normal rates since it was a preferable substitute. The initial analysis looked good enough for Eldon to begin selling his own company's stock short; its price would drop in the simulated stock market when news of the weather problem became known to all players. He also began buying up high-priced fish protein futures since he would be able to deliver at much lower prices later.

Minor military action against Bulmar was called for and his own security teams needed more hovercraft and patrol boats. Submarine attack on the power plant would be likely. The extra force could also step up the level of clandestine pirate raids on coastwise shipping at the nearest continent. That would make it seem like his response to the current threat would be military. A military move would please his opponents since they knew he was too weak to succeed.

The results of last turn were now in. Cooler weather, weakening stock prices, more guerilla attacks on farm teams, and fewer tourists dropped him from fifth in the current standing to a bare sixth. It would look worse for the next few game months but with a bit of luck on timing, it should break his way close enough to game end to prevent effective counter moves. He began feeding his new decision values to the computer early to leave as much time as possible for negotiating. His weakening position would make some happy but others might help. Not help from commaraderie, but the tougher his decline was for Bulmar and his friends, the less time they had to worry about others.

Others would help Eldon fight their battles and the surprise he had in store would be too late for them to realize they'd been aiding a real threat, not a floundering player barely able to stay in the game. Eldon could finish fourth of eleven and third wasn't out of reach. Not bad when at least four of the others clearly out-rated him.....

NOTICE: NAME FOR HYMENOPTRIA

We received many well thought out suggestions for a name with some pizazz for Hymenoptria. If we eventually select a name from those sent, the lucky subscriber will get a copy of the game free, plus an additional six issues on his/her TSG subscription. They will also get special mention and notice, ta ta, in TSG. If we go with Jack Vance's THE DRAGON MASTERS for a name, thanks to everyone and hope you buy the game.

STELLAR CONQUEST UPDATE

With comments from several hundred gamers now in hand, it's apparent which aspects of STELLAR CONQUEST are giving most trouble. Many who've become experienced have suggested a number of variations and extensions that add greatly to your enjoyment. But, some others are having problems. The commentary below should be taken as a general help and guide where needed. If you've adapted the game to your own likes and enjoyment, so much the better.

PLAY BALANCE

STELLAR CONQUEST is best for four. The total game resources are in balance with the game system when four players have a 40-60 year game. If there are two players, only half the board should be used to achieve an equivalent balance of time, space, and resources. If two players use the whole board, too much time is given for development and production. Too many years will pass before players are in a position to contact and combat each other. Each player will then likely have a large industrial base and most of the technological developments which destroys the production/expansion/technology/conflict balance You aren't supposed to be able to achieve everything available during the game. The closeness of opponents should force you to choose only a few things to do in a four player game. If you use only half the map in a two player game, the basic balance is sustained and your opponent again becomes a major problem.

Three player games are probably the hardest to balance. Using the whole map provides a bit too much maneuver-room, but it is still playable. Starting points should be 1, 2, and the map edge hex near Mizar or 3, 4, and the map edge hex near Zosca. The gas clouds around Mizar and Zosca should be ignored when those hexes are used in starting. A three player game using only half the map with the third player starting in the middle has provided competitive play in some brief testing we've done. A three player, half-board game using the short scenario (described below) with the third player starting at Draconis provided an active, short game that seemed to maintain excellent balance. If you're short a fourth player and some time, it's worth investigating.

When developing your own variations, keep the concept of balance uppermost. The game design is a good base for adding changes, but balance is the key to a competitive variant. Two things that will tip you to poor balance arelack of interaction between players and achievement of too many technological developments. Player's strategies may lead to the same symptoms. If there's too much productive wealth in a four player game, it means players are missing opportunities to capture colonies and aren't keeping each other off balance.

SHORT GAME VARIATIONS

The length of STELLAR CONQUEST isn't so much a problem but a matter of preference for many, especially experienced, players. Slow development increases variety in each player's position and gives more control over differing approaches. The game achieves that goal but it is hard to play in one sitting unless you really know the rules and don't have players who dither and dally to the nth degree over each miniscule decision. One thing we've used in post play testing is a time limit on turns according to whether its a Production Year or not. The time limit effect puts a realistic decision making pressure on players and avoids the problems of slowing down the game with attempts at optimizing each and every minor aspect of play. SC is a strategic game that should be won and lost at that level. Society leaders don't try to control minor details in an optimal fashion, they set general policy and control the larger movements. A player who isn't doing a good job on strategy stands little chance of winning anyway.

A workable short game scenario cuts the time between production years to three turns and starts each player off with a colony already established on a Terran Planet. All the G class star cards with either 60 or 80 million population limit Terran type planet are shuffled together and each player in the game is dealt one. Players then choose a star from the ones listed. Four player games use Scorpii, Bootis, Ceti, and Canis. Three player games can use Diphda, Aurigae, and Tauri or any other combination of three that gives reasonable development chances to each player. Two player games use Ceti and Canis or Scorpii and Bootis and ignore the other half of the board. Each player should startwith a colony of 40 million, IIT, 3MA, ATK, 6 ESC, 10 CT, and 6 SCT. Each of the colonies initially inhabited by a player should be considered to have a population limit of 80 million, even in those cases where 60 million is the limit shown on the Star Card.

The short scenario will cut about 25% from the game time and even more if players want to drop one production year and shorten the game all the way to 27 years. The scenario will still be reasonably balanced within the framework of the original rules though the developmental aspect is compacted.

THE RIU, NM, PFS HASSLE

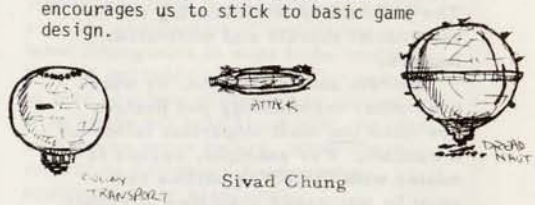
The nearest thing to a functional weakness in STELLAR CONQUEST relates to the interaction of Robotic Industrial Units, Planetary Force Screens, and habitable Natural Metallization planets. If a player is fortunate enough to find one of the few habitable NM planets early in the game, he can dump all his population on the plaNet and concentrate on building up industry. The doubling of output effect combined with no need for Controlled Environment Technology results in an industrial build up other players can't match. If the player also develops RIU's his industrial base becomes entirely freed from population constraints. If PFS is also acquired, the planet becomes an unconquerable base.

We've had a number of letters about this and most players have devised various strategms for resolving the issue. Use of NM inhabitable planets is a problem, but with four experienced players it's hard to get away with. The other players gang up on you if they decide that's what you're doing. It's more a problem if there are less than four experienced players. For example, if two players use the whole star map, the first one to find a NM habitable planet does have an advantage because he has no immediate threat. Aside from that, the information in some letters leads us to believe that part of the problem lies in actually playing the game wrong. When someone speaks of having 30 or 40 DN's by the 24th year, it's hard to see how that is possible. Maybe some are having production every year instead of every fourth year.

While learning the game it may be best to play as if habitable planets don't have NM. We have begun to play with only the MT planets habitable since the ST habitables offer even more advantage. That way there's less worry about the whole game being distorted by one factor. If you are familiar with the game and playing balanced scenarios, it isn't too hard to off-set a player who looks as if he's gone for a habitable NM. Constant probes force him to divert production for defense. His population won't grow radpily, so he can be confined to the one colony. And, if you play it right, you can conquer the habitable NM before production is diverted for defense.

If a player begins putting up PFS's he may be hurting himself. PFS can't be built for a colony with less than 20 IU's of output and they aren't cheap to develop or build. Few of our players even bother much with them any more except in longer games. The PFS fallacy sinks home fully when you have a powerful colony with PFS and a weak fleet and it becomes neutralized. A fairly strong fleet can drive off your weak cover then leave a single warship to neutralize the whole colony. The colony can't launch a ship or attack the warship with missles for as long as it remains in the star hex. A PFS has its uses, but the research and production cost to get it may just leave you in an expensive cage.

Many have written in with extensions of the technological sequences. There's much interest in anti-PFS developments and new planetary missles, beams, and such that can actively attack warships in a star hex instead of waiting to be attacked. When SC was designed we deliberately avoided optional rules and scenarios. All the effort went into a clean basic game. We had a hunch that gamers would devise their own variations and do a better job of it than we had time for. That's turning out to be the case, which encourages us to stick to basic game design.



Sivad Chung

Notice----Notice

Designers who want us to evaluate their games for possible publication should:

1. Have the rules notarized as the product of your effort.
2. Send the game as certified mail.
3. Have the rules typed double-spaced.
4. Include all components, counters, maps, play-aids, etc. in a complete ready-to-play form. (i.e. counters cut out, etc.)
5. Hand-drawn and lettered components are acceptable, but be neat. If it can't be read, it can't be evaluated.
6. Include self-addressed return envelope with sufficient postage.

We will try to return your game within 60 days with an initial statement of our interest. Games of interest will most likely be returned for suggested revision. If a game has no chance of making our publishing schedule, we will so state with suggestions for possible alternative publishers. All submissions are eligible for the game design contest awards. We will publish games by outside designers in 1976. Here's your chance for fame and fortune--well, maybe a few bucks anyway.

THE INTANGIBLES HEADACHE

About the most frustrating problem a game designer faces is trying to simulate intangible factors. You're o.k. in abstracting combat factors to represent unit strengths even though the effectiveness of combat units would realistically vary in different situations. Various types of movement rules over abstracted maps are, again, not very realistic, but are acceptable representation of reality. The problem is in simulating the often crucial morale and motivation factors.

Morale and motivation, or whatever other terminology you prefer, are often the most important factor in a conflict. For example, anyone familiar with Civil War battles can point to numerous examples of morale dominating all other factors. Some games use morale indexes which reduce combat strengths or otherwise reduce combat effectiveness of a player's forces when certain conditions occur. Usually these indexes are related to loss levels or terrain lost or gained. A morale index is a fair attempt at simulating the effect of a change in morale, but it can be grossly unrealistic.

For example, getting back to the Civil War, relative troop losses often played little part in morale of opposing forces. A case could even be made that, in certain conditions, the more desperate the situation became, the better some troops fought. In other battles, inexperienced forces, who might be expected to be less reliable, often turned the tide of battle in favor of their side. You could simulate such vagaries by suitably random tables of various outcomes, but to do so separates the gamer from control of his situation. This isn't to say a game should be predictable in outcome. But, a game that has too many random factors becomes too much a game of chance.

In real life we know that something accounted for some green troops breaking under little pressure, while others fought stubbornly. That "something" probably wasn't randomly beyond the control of real-life leaders. We can even conjecture that we lost the Vietnam War because of the stubborn morale and effectiveness of the Communist cadre system. Asian Communist societies have an important nucleus of loyal, dedicated political cadres that control/motivate the rest of the society in war. The North Vietnamese cadres prosecuted the political nature of war far beyond our ability to endure, despite the fact that their society absorbed all the material damage.

A conflict game puts you in the role of leader of certain forces in conflict. In a game you try to maximize the material strength of your position and weaken your enemy's with minimal loss to yourself. The game is structured such that increasing your numerical advantage and winning are almost synonymous . In real life we might not emphasize the same things. If the Vietnam War has a lasting affect on our world view, we might place prime emphasis on developing a fanatically dedicated, highly cohesive core of capable people to support our effort. Such a core of support can keep alive the opportunity for victory almost regardless of material status. The only effective weapon against such a group is an equally dedicated, highly motivated opposition. In this view, it is the dedication and capability of the core group that brings victory more than differences in material strength.

Given the formulation of morale's importance, what can a game designer do? At this point in time, the answer seems to be "not much." James Dunnigan of SPI developed the use of leader units that vary a player's control over units not under control of a leadership unit. Morale-type indexes, as mentioned, come in several varieties. The weakness of leader units and morale indexes is their random effect on unit control and the threshold effect on combat effectiveness. As a leader you are left in the position of knowing your control may be subject to randomness, but unable to do anything about it.

In strategic games with a time span sufficient to allow evolution of basic factors, a player should have some chance at improving the morale and dedication of his forces. In the area of social factors, the society leader has options to improve a society's committment and effort. The game design problem is abstracting moticational factors into meaningful rules mechanics. The problem cannot be attacked without making some assumptions about how loyally motivated cadre groups are created. The assumptions selected will vary according to different value systems.

A capitalist/democratic value system will say people are motivated by freedom to acquire material rewards. A communist value system might say people are motivated by right thinking and action to advance the advent of the true democratic communist state. Whether people are better motivated by individually enjoyed material rewards or gratified idealism in the service of principle is an open question, but it leaves game designers with a big headache. It may be best to avoid assessing different value judgements of various social systems. Maybe what's important is how much people believe in their system and how their belief is strengthened, regardless of what the belief is. The closest thing I can think of to the Asian Communist cadre dedication in the U.S. are fundamentalist religious groups. Characterizing the drive of communist cadres as religious-like fervor may seem far-fetched, but the analogy holds up pretty well. Both groups are characterized by unshakable belief, submergence of personal self in that belief, and willingness to sacrifice and strive to advance that belief.

What comparative motivation seems to be boiling down to is strength of a shared belief. The more strongly a group believes in a shared principle, the more effectively it mobilizes for action. A capitalist/democratic group shares the belief of personal advancement, but suffers lower cohesion as a consequence. It's interesting to note that in Vietnam the South Vietnamese group to most successfully resist intrusion by Communist cadres was the Cao Dai, an intensely cohesive religious sect. With a formulation of motivation as strength of shared belief, the designer of games is free to develop a game containing different socio-economic systems in competition without valuing which system is the most effective utilizer of people. Productivity of labor could then be made a function of per capita labor capitalization and motivation of workforce thus sidestepping issues of which system is inherently most productive. Each player can then select the socio-economic system he desires for his society and know the game is still in competitive balance.

The subject is obviously larger than a few pages, but hopefully this will serve to set those interested in game design to thinking. The designer who first develops a game with a viable abstraction of motivation related intangibles is sure to be imitated. He will probably cause conflict gaming to rise to a new evolutionary plateau. If he keeps his wits about him, he may even make some money, while the rest of us designers keep taking aspirin for our headache.

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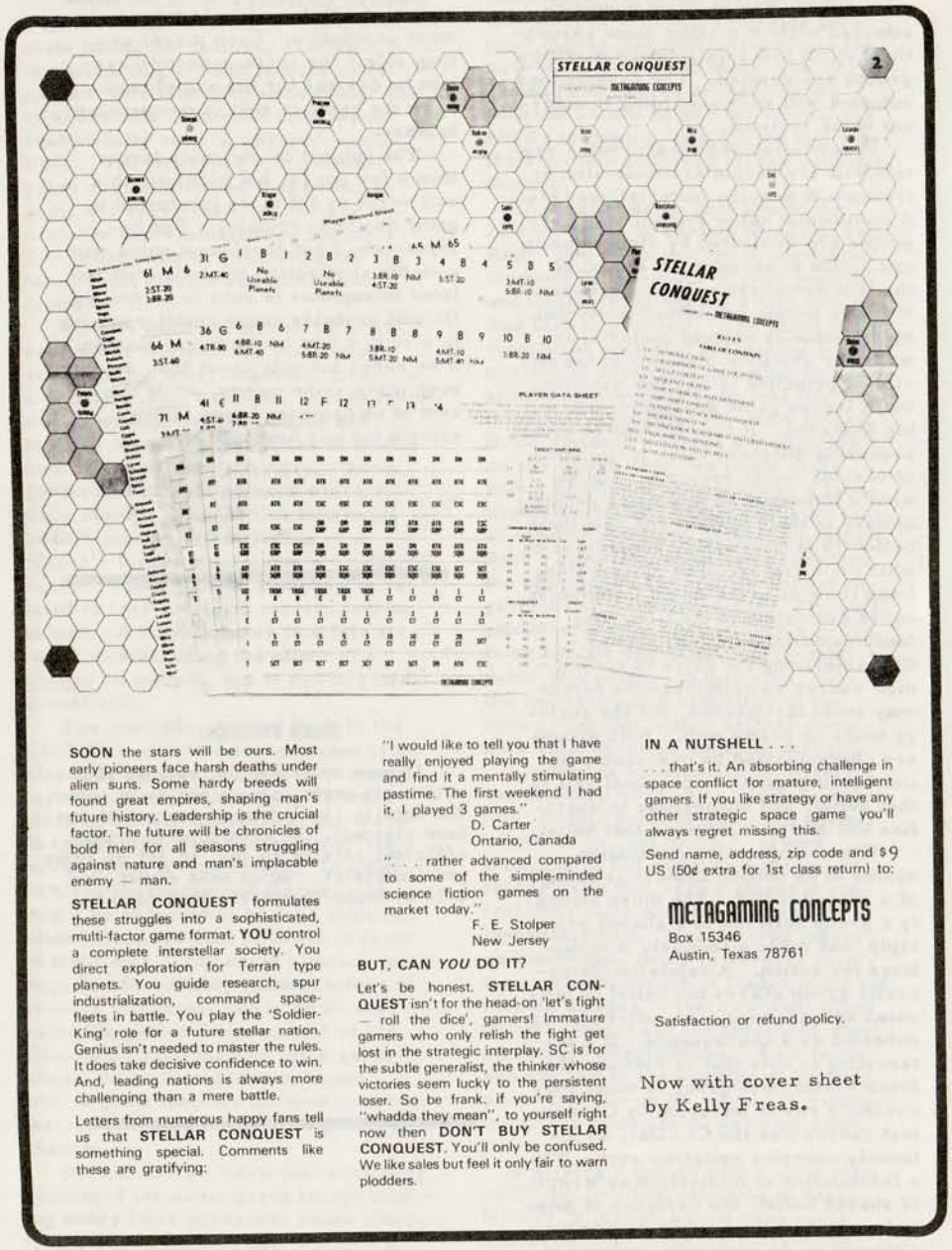

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*Raymond Pouliot pointed out our misspelling of this word, but too late for us to correct it in the body of the text. This is the proper spelling.

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THE YTHRI

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When the Terran Empire decides to "adjust" its border with the Domain of Ythri, Avalon is a prime objective. Home of the successful bi-racial Human/Ythri culture, Avalon becomes the pivotal battle of the war. Now the novel by Poul Anderson is translated into a game scenario by Metagaming Concepts. Abstraction is a basic premise of the game. THE YTHRI does not attempt to follow the book blow by blow, but extracts the basic situation into a system in which each player can win. The game system is significantly less complex than Stellar Conquest, making a faster-playing, easier to learn game.

THE YTHRI utilizes a space map with Avalon's moon Morgana and space forts in orbit. All space ship movement and combat occurs on the space board. A second map of Avalon is designed to facilitate planetary/space combat interactions. The Avalon map has a "megahex" grid for atmospheric movement and combat super-imposed on a standard small hex grid for combat. Movement and combat are kept simple and attrition of forces will be substantial as play progresses.

The three basic types of units are space ships, atmospheric craft, and "bounce" troops. All "bounce" troops are actually airborne with anti-gravity units or self-powered Ythri units. Because the "bounce" units are much less mobile than atmospheric units and operate at lower altitudes, they function much like ground troops but with greater mobility.

The Terran Empire player has to sweep the smaller Ythri fleet quickly out of the way, disembark planetary combat units, and neutralize Avalonian ground installations. THE YTHRI player uses his limited space and planetary force to impose maximum delay in the invasion to allow time for help to arrive. Victory conditions allow either player a clear-cut win, unlike the novel.

The combat system smoothly integrates the different types of forces into a unified interaction of two players. It is unlike any existing historical or space game simulation, being created uniquely for THE YTHRI. Gamers who revise games for their own enjoyment may even find it provides a single planet combat addition for strategic, multi-star games like Stellar Conquest.

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